

As students returned to school, we immediately implemented a Recovery Curriculum with the aim of helping our students understand what happened during the COVID Pandemic. This curriculum helps to put back some of the structures and routines they have lost, but also return to a model of learning through the implementation of highly motivating purposeful and meaningful activities.

**This guide is intended to explain how the Recovery Curriculum works at Oak Lodge School.**

Key Points:

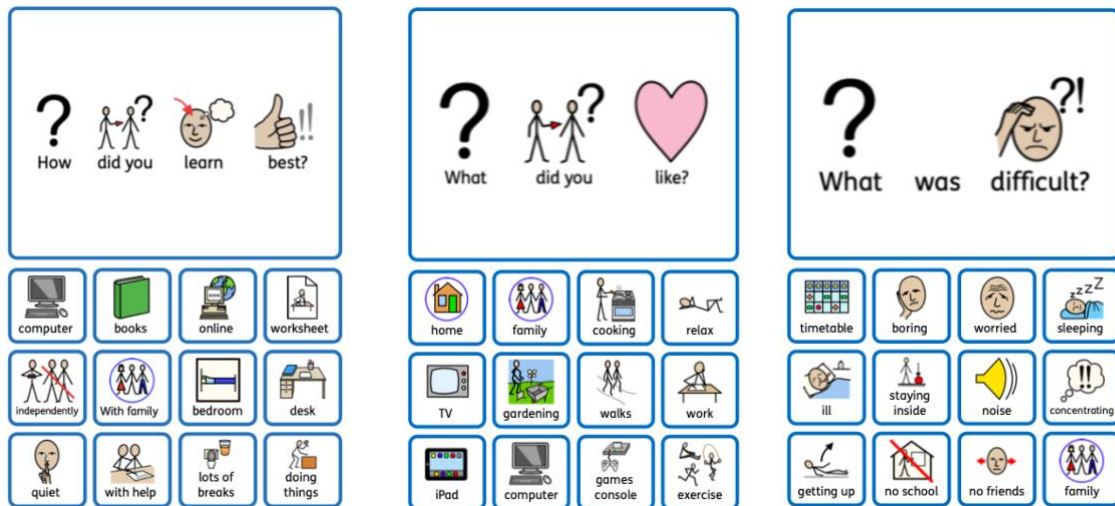
- Every learner is regarded as potentially vulnerable to anxiety during the transition back to school
- We are mindful that every child's experience is likely to have been different.
- One size does not fit all - any approach should be differentiated and personalised for each individual
- Our student's behaviour and cognitive or academic ability is likely to temporarily regress during periods of anxiety, we can offer the flexibility as students are ready to have increased demands in their education program
- To ensure recovery is on track, SAFETY FIRST – ensure students feel safe and regulated before attempting to engage in the pressure of academic catch-up.
- But above all offer reintegration back to routines and rebuild missed relationships and structures

*Professor Barry Carpenter, 2021*

*Researcher in Special Educational Needs*

We aim to help our students understand we are still here and haven't abandoned them. They begin to accept school is still here and we will help them get back to school in the safest possible way. Trust begins to be re-established. The intention behind the Recovery Curriculum is to provide opportunities to rebuild the sense of community, to offer space to re-establish a sense of self and to relearn skills. The focus will be gently returning to some resemblance of routine whilst enabling play, outdoor exploration and physical development.

The **Recovery Curriculum** is intended to be a complementary curriculum initially for the first term; as we return to school life, with the aim of rebuilding and recovering some lost moments. Some students may need a different time scale to bounce back to learning, but we will personalise that experience as necessary, in response to individual need. Offering a continuum of activities that promote social emotional growth.



During the autumn term, teachers and support staff are making observations, focusing on what engages the student, finding out their interests, how they regulate, how they communicate and any interventions needed to help them settle more easily. Staff will also be assessing each students' learning style and their preferred way of learning both at home and at school. This is because for some students they may need to switch back to a temporary home learning model at any time. Many of our students have a unique learning style that will shine through if we offer carefully planned programs of support.

The 5 'Losses' outlined in the Recovery Curriculum as an impact of school closures

- Routine,
- Friendship,
- Opportunity,
- Structure,
- Freedom.

In order to address those 5 losses, the Recovery Curriculum is built on **5 Levers** through a systematic, relationships-based approach to support the re-engagement of students back into learning.

- **Lever 1: Relationships** - many of the relationships that were thriving, may need to be invested in and restored.
- **Lever 2: Community** - we must recognise that curriculum will have been based in the community during lockdown. We need to re-engage our students in the transitioning of learning and back into school.
- **Lever 3: Transparent Curriculum** - all of our students will feel that they have lost time in learning. We need to work to get those structures back.

- Level 4: **Metacognition** – during lockdown our students will have been learning in different ways online, or with limited resources they may have. It is vital that we reskill and rebuild their confidence as learners in the classroom.
- Level 5: **Space** - to be, to rediscover self, to find their voice, and to allow them time to settle, bond and talk about what has happened in the space in between.

### Reconnecting with school environment

For some students, it may have been almost six months since they stepped foot inside the school building. Most students may have had very limited experience of places they used to visit other than their own home, since the lockdown began. Entering the school building may have triggered feelings of anxiety or worry, particularly if they struggled with this prior to the closure.

For all students, there is a need to allow them the time to explore, re-discover and connect with the school again. It is also important that they feel safe and secure in the school. The social distancing measures experienced in the wider community are likely to still remain in place throughout September and the autumn term, this could contribute to anxiety. The lessons learned at Oak Lodge during the partial opening in the summer term, help us to understand how we can try to teach the students safe practices as they return to full time education.

Some reflections to consider around student well-being, as some of our students may:

- Be aware of the news, but be unable to process everything they hear, leading to a lot of confusion and panic
- Forget the rules about handwashing and social distancing or become over fixated on cleaning
- Find it very hard to adapt to learning at home – this is ok!
- Missed their peers at school, and need support to maintain those relationships
- Starting a task, staying on task and completing the task may be difficult to achieve and your child might need help with one or more of these stages until they are more competent and regulated

Oak Lodge School has been a stable and consistent setting for all our students for some time. For some they may have had little preparation for transitions. We have tried to establish as much as we can, some stability and preparation for unplanned changes or uncertainty. As we have no idea if a switch back to home learning may occur for any family due to period of brief isolation.

Preparing the students for any temporary return to a blended (home and school) learning model is an essential part of the Recovery Curriculum. Explaining why this happens and how their lessons will work between home and school will prepare students better, so they are more resilient to those changes. For our semi-formal learners who have significant learning and communication differences our aim is to offer them predictability in their routines and enable recovery through mutually enjoyable activities that make learning fun.



### Communication between home and school

We aim to maintain good communication with parents/ carers. We may ask if there are any changes that could impact on well-being of students so that our dedicated team of pastoral practitioners can offer holistic support.

We may miss the subtle signs that a student has some underlying anxieties or note a behaviour change. Parents and carers are often best placed help us to understand changes in circumstances that we should be aware of.

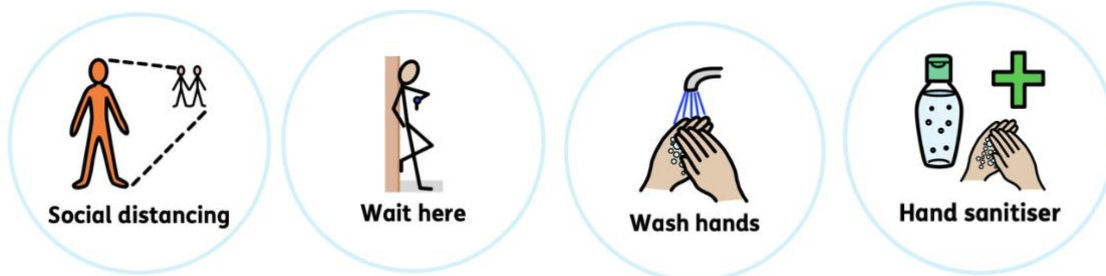
We may ask parents questions about how their child is feeling about leaving the house and coming back to school? This will help us to plan recovery in a collaborative way with all important people in the child or young person's life.

We offer a welcoming and supportive environment during this period of change and uncertainty.

Some of the ways we make sure your child is welcomed back with clear supports in place is set out below:

Each student will have:

- Photographs of staff and classmates in their bubble/class.
- Photographs/ of their classroom and areas they use through the school, staff will prepare photos and videos of some of the shared spaces of school that are temporarily out of use. Then use these in lessons to talk through the changes and the use of the areas. Video is a great way to provoke discussion and get students perspective on things in a structured class setting.
- Clear visuals of the symbols and signs around school and what they mean- including the toilet areas are available in the classroom.



- Social stories or videos about handwashing, social distancing, bubbles, masks, how the classroom will look are all readily available.
- Relaxation or calming areas and how they are used also forms part of each student's class routine
- Clear expectations for break and lunchtimes, use of toilets, how to wait if the toilet is busy will be taught
- Set protocols for transition around the school, lining up, walk using outside routes to avoid crowded corridors has been shared with students.
- Visual timetable of the structure of the day and map with zones of areas that are not to be visited
- Visuals of what to do if students are anxious, need to talk or want somewhere quiet to go these should be accessible near the door – a list of choices of spaces key people who support? I need to talk cards / I need a break card the protocol for taking a break (supervised)
- Zones of Regulation should be visible and students taught how to use these.



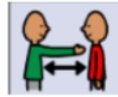
THE  
**ZONES** OF  
REGULATION™

- Lots of opportunities for self-regulation are modelled in group settings such as conditioned relaxation. Opportunities for structured social interaction both in the classroom and outdoors as students are facilitated in their interactions to observe social distancing but maintain peer interactions.

### Visual Routines



We will have to wash our hands.



We will have to keep our distance from other people



Some people might be wearing masks.



Other things will be the same

- New routines for arriving to school, beginning and finishing activities and moving between areas and bus lines are communicated using visual supports
- We use symbols and visual images to support new expectations in class and for moving around school to subject specialist classrooms

### Calming strategies

#### Happiness or calming boxes

- Student chooses objects that they can see and physically touch which help bring them a calm and happy state of mind.
- Preferred favourite things can be stored in their own tray and not shared
- This helps students to regulate and have a clear predictable routine for what is available when they are anxious.



The **Zones of Regulation** is a framework and curriculum for teaching strategies for emotional and sensory self-management. Rooted in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT); the zones approach uses four colours to help students identify how they are feeling in the moment, giving their emotions a level of

alertness to help them recognise any shift in their arousal level, as well as guide them to use strategies to support when they are over or under aroused in any situation.

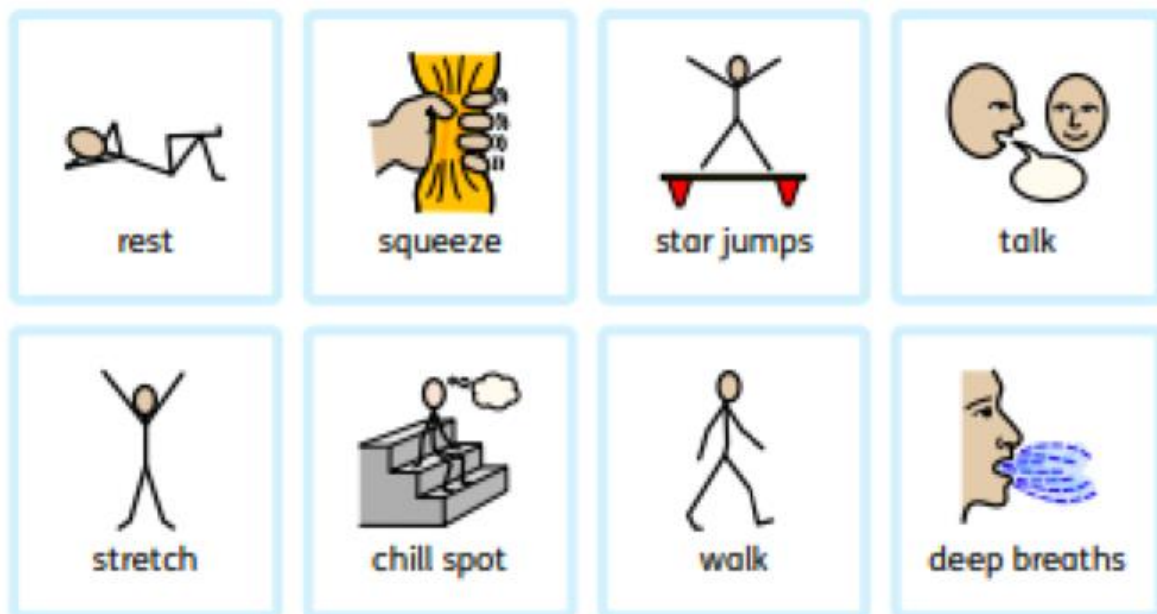
There are different ways our students choose to regulate when they feel anxious or frustrated.

**Blue Zone tools:** help wake up our bodies, feel better and regain focus.

**Green Zone tools:** help us stay calm, focused and feeling good. These are often proactive strategies.

**Yellow Zone tools:** help us regain control and calm ourselves.

**Red Zone tools:** help us stay safe and start to calm down.



An example of some of the activities that will be planned for the students for each of the 5 Levers towards recovery.

**Level 1: Relationships** – Greet each morning with a smile, a relaxed body language that shows the students we are happy to see them. Identify and build personal strengths and interests. Showing trust through classroom jobs and responsibilities. Connecting and making new friendships and bonding with classmates in their ‘bubble’ through facilitated play, supported to socially distance where appropriate.

**Level 2: Community** – foster a sense of belonging to a school community again, remembering students past and present. Make time in class for students to share what they did outside of school, maybe they developed a new interest? Or learned a new hobby or skill? ‘making Poms Poms? Planting seeds



together in the new edible gardens. 'Cook and talk' making individual snacks in life skills sessions. Contribute to whole school project through our autumn term themes 'rainbows' and 'habitats'.

Lever 3: **Transparent Curriculum** – It is important we offer the student real facts, as they will have heard a lot about the pandemic through the media that may trigger anxiety. We will promote transparency by sharing the daily timetable with the students, share ideas for lessons and talk through the plan for the lessons in a structured way. Build in predictability with repetitive and familiar routines. Find ways to provide students with choice and control and incorporate 'student voice' so they have some ownership over their learning.

Lever 4: **Metacognition** – we help our students love to learn again, finding out the different ways they prefer to learn and problem solve ways they can move on when they are 'stuck'. Staff make time to observe and reflect on how the things the students value the most then incorporate into their learning experiences. Rebuild confidence in a task, it is fine to repeat activities to improve mastery and skill development. Re-teach learning in different ways including teaching to use the home learning resources.

Lever 5: **Space** – we offer the time and space to adjust to a whole day of lessons and new classroom layouts. Allow time to explore and offer reasons for changes. Build in time for creativity and not rush to get through work for the sake of it. Plan time for movement breaks and remind students they can try again to 'have another go tomorrow'. Promote an ethos in the classroom where everyone feels supported. Offer physical spaces to be that are quiet and calm. Acknowledge and validate feelings through specific teaching of the zones of regulation and emotional literacy programs such as 'Social thinking' offering space to reflect and discuss as a group.

#### References and Reading

The Recovery Curriculum <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/recoverycurriculum>

Dr. Tina Rae <https://www.evidenceforlearning.net/learningshared/recoverycurriculum8-tina-rae>

Mentally Healthy Schools Resource for teachers and parents toolkit

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/getting-started/coronavirus-and-mental-health/>

Developed by the Salvesen Mindroom Centre, who specialise in supporting young people with learning disabilities and their families, and has free resources linked to coronavirus for pupils, families and teachers

[http://www.mindroom.org/index.php/help\\_and\\_support/resources\\_for\\_parents/back\\_to\\_school\\_toolkit/](http://www.mindroom.org/index.php/help_and_support/resources_for_parents/back_to_school_toolkit/)

Anna Freud <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/>